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TAGS: PHUM OPRC PGOV IZ IT HUMAN RIGHTS

SUBJECT: ITALIAN RIGHTS GROUP PUBLICIZES NEW EVIDENCE OF IRAQI BRUTALITY

1. SUMMARY: A PROMINENT ITALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 28 A NEW REPORT ON VIOLENCE COMMITTED AGAINST POLITICAL OPPONENTS AND PRISONERS BY SADDAM HUSSEIN
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AND HIS REGIME. ITALIAN MEDIA PUBLISHED EXCERPTS, PROVIDING ITALIANS SOME UNCOMFORTABLE (BUT TIMELY) REMINDERS OF THE LIKELY CONSEQUENCES OF SADDAM'S CONTINUATION IN POWER. END SUMMARY.

2. ON FEBRUARY 28, "HANDS OFF CAIN" (NESSUNO TOCCHI CAINO), A HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP ASSOCIATED WITH THE SMALL, INDEPENDENT RADICAL PARTY, PRESENTED TO THE PRESS A NEW REPORT, "THE DEATH PENALTY AND MORE UNDER SADDAM HUSSEIN." (FULL TEXT AVAILABLE AT WWW.HANDSOFFCAIN.ORG) THE ORGANIZATION'S GENERAL SECRETARY, SERGIO D'ELIA, SAID THE GROUP WAS PUBLISHING THE REPORT IN ADVANCE OF ITS ANNUAL GLOBAL SURVEY OF THE DEATH PENALTY BECAUSE "AWARENESS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION - IN PARTICULAR THE WIDESPREAD USE OF THE DEATH PENALTY - IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT TO CONSIDER IN THE CURRENT DEBATE ON THE IRAQ CRISIS." THOUGH IT FAVORS COMPLETE ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY, THE GROUP GENERALLY PROVIDES A SOPHISTICATED, NUANCED ANALYSIS OF ITS USE IN THE U.S.

3. THE TEXT CONTAINS A COLLECTION OF EPISODES ALREADY GATHERED IN THE REPORTS ISSUED LAST YEAR BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND BY THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION AND NEW CIRCUMSTANCES OF VIOLENCE INFLICTED ON IRAQIS. THE CASES PUBLISHED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ITALY REGARD A LONG LIST OF EXECUTIONS OF PRESUMPTIVE POLITICAL OPPONENTS AS WELL AS MORE THAN TWENTY ARMY AND AIR FORCE OFFICERS CONDEMNED FOR TREASON, MONITORED BY ARAB MEDIA AND BBC INTERNATIONAL. HANDS OFF CAIN COUNTED 214 EXECUTIONS IN 2002 THROUGH REPORTS BY VARIOUS IRAQI MEDIA AND OPPOSITION SOURCES. IN 2001, THE TOTAL WAS 179. THESE TOTALS DO NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT UNCONFIRMED MASS EXECUTIONS REPORTED BY DISSIDENTS.
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4. THE REPORT ALSO HIGHLIGHTS NEW DEATH PENALTY PROVISIONS ADDED IN THE MILITARY CRIMINAL CODE RELATED TO AIR DEFENSE FORCE AND DISCLOSED BY THE IRAQI COMMUNIST PARTY. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT COULD BE INFLICTED NOT ONLY FOR DAMAGING WEAPONS AND MILITARY EQUIPMENT BUT ALSO FOR "REVEALING SECRETS AND INFORMATION ON CASUALTIES TO PEOPLE OUTSIDE THEIR UNIT AND THE SPREADING OF RUMORS WITHIN THEIR UNIT." THE VAGUENESS OF THE REGULATIONS COULD LEAD TO OTHER ABUSES, HANDS OFF CAIN EMPHASIZED.

5. AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE MFA UNDERSECRETARY MARGHERITA BONIVER STATED THAT THE GOI WAS WILLING TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN ORDER TO STOP THE MASSACRE OF MANY INNOCENTS. SEVERAL NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS AND TELEVISION NEWS COVERED THE EVENT WITH ARTICLES AND INTERVIEWS. HAND OFF CAIN IS ONE OF ITALY'S MOST ACTIVE HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY GROUPS; IT HAS PROMOTED INITIATIVES AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY AND IN FAVOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT. IT WAS CREATED IN 1993 BY A GROUP OF ACTIVISTS OF THE RADICAL PARTY, A SMALL, INDEPENDENT, CLASSICALLY LIBERAL PARTY FOUNDED BY MARCO PANNELLA. THE RADICAL PARTY IS GENERALLY OPEN AND PRO-AMERICAN IN ITS OUTLOOK.

6. COMMENT: WHILE THE GROUP'S REPORT IS UNLIKELY TO CAUSE A SEA CHANGE IN ITALIAN PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT MILITARY ACTION, IT IS A TIMELY REMINDER, NONETHELESS, OF THE PROBLEMS INSIDE IRAQ ABOVE AND BEYOND THOSE OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION.

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